



## INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN PLATEAU STATE

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the role of interfaith dialogue in conflict resolution, focusing on Christian-Muslim relations in Plateau State, Nigeria. Plateau State has long been a hotspot for religious and ethnic tensions, primarily between Christian and Muslim communities. These conflicts often rooted in competition for land, political power, and economic resources, have escalated into violent confrontations over the years. The research examines how interfaith dialogue has been employed as a tool for fostering mutual understanding, promoting peaceful coexistence, and mitigating violence in the region. The study employs qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews with religious leaders, community members, and participants in interfaith initiatives. Focus group discussions and case studies of existing interfaith programs were also conducted to gain insights into the effectiveness of dialogue in resolving conflicts. Archival research and secondary data sources, such as reports from peace building organizations, were analyzed to provide historical context. The findings highlight the significance of sustained dialogue in building trust, addressing grievances, and creating a framework for long-term peace. However, challenges such as deep-seated mistrust, political manipulation and economic disparities hinder the full effectiveness of interfaith efforts. The study recommends the creation of more inclusive interfaith platforms, government support for grassroots peace initiatives, and ongoing capacity-building for religious leaders to serve as peace mediators. Economic development programs should be integrated into dialogue efforts to address the underlying socio-economic factors fueling the conflict. This research contributes to the broader discourse on peace building in Nigeria, offering insights into the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue as a strategy for resolving religious conflicts in deeply divided societies.*

**Keywords:** Interfaith, Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, Christian-Muslim.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, a country with a rich tapestry of ethnic and religious diversity, has frequently experienced conflicts rooted in religious differences, particularly between Christians and Muslims. Among the regions most affected by this tension is Plateau State, where clashes between these two religious groups have often escalated into violent confrontations. The historical and socio-political complexities in the region have contributed to an atmosphere of mistrust, with religious identities becoming a key factor in both communal harmony and discord. Interfaith dialogue has emerged as a vital tool for addressing these conflicts and fostering peace between the Christian and Muslim communities. By promoting understanding, tolerance and cooperation, such dialogue seeks to bridge the divide that often exacerbates tensions. However, despite the efforts of religious leaders



and peace building organizations, challenges remain in achieving lasting peace, largely due to deep-seated prejudices, political manipulation, and socio-economic factors. This study seeks to explore the role of interfaith dialogue in conflict resolution, with a focus on Christian-Muslim relations in Plateau State. By examining the successes, limitations, and ongoing efforts in the region, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how interfaith initiatives can be strengthened to foster long-term peace and reconciliation.

### **Conceptual Underpinning of Conflict**

Conflict is a concept which connotes disharmony and social instability. Sociologically conflict refers to a condition where there is social antagonism or social disharmony. Alli (2011) states that, conflict occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. According to Francis (2011), conflict is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Conflict as social phenomena has been an important aspect of human existence. Alli (2011) avers that conflict can be considered as a social necessity, normal and functional and indeed inevitable aspect of the healthy functioning of all societies. He explained further that conflict has also been considered to be an obstacle to progress, political stability, and economic prosperity and over all socio-economic development because of its destructive impact.

Furthermore, Onu (2009) opines that conflict is the manifestation of hostile attitude in face of conflicting interests between individuals, groups or states. He states that these conflicting interests can be over resources, identity, power, status or values. Abalogu and Ojukwu (2021) opine that conflict is a situation where one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for attainment of a goal. In line with this thought Otite and Albert (2001) agree that conflict is the consequence of the pursuit of divergent interest, goals and aspirations by individual and groups in defined social and physical environments. Similarly Maiangwa (2017) concurs that conflict is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Ibeanu (2011) writing on the same subjects matter highlights that conflict expresses a direct or indirect relation between two or more actors in which they attempt to undermine the interest of one another often through the instrumentality of violence. He goes further to explain that the social conditions such as poverty, exclusion, intimidation, oppression, want, fear and physiological pressures can breed conflicts and violence. Since conflict is inherent in man, it cannot be completely wiped out. This is because man's quest for power and authority is also inherent in him. Agreeably, Ndubuisi (2018) opines that conflict is simply a disagreement and that if disagreement is not properly managed it could degenerate in violent or armed conflict, which is physical war that involves the use of weapons like gun, spear, daggers, bows and arrows as well as other sophisticated weapons. Conflict however whether hostile, violent or war is a means and manifestation of a process to redress a perceive lack of respect for one another's need and views. It can be summarized in the opinion of Okolo and Iheanacho (2023), who posit that conflict is part and parcel of human existence and is as old as man, hence it is a result interaction in the context of irreconcilable ends and where one's ability to satisfy needs or ends depends on the choices, decisions and behaviours



of others. Having clarified the sociological concept of conflict, it is important to evaluate the history of conflict in Plateau state.

### **Brief Historical Discourse of Conflict in Plateau State**

Conflicts in Plateau State have existed long before the 2001 crisis in Jos. Violent confrontations over farming and grazing land were sporadically reported as far back as colonial times. Prior to the 2001 crisis, disputes between farmers and herders in Plateau State had not escalated to the same levels as in some neighbouring states. Local community leaders often managed to resolve tensions peacefully. However, as agricultural production expanded over the past decades, competition for land between farming and grazing intensified. The increase in farming reduced access to water for cattle herders, altering the dynamics between farmers and herders (Blench, 2004). Fulani pastoralists have frequently been accused of allowing their cattle to graze on the land of indigenous populations, leading to cattle rustling and attack on Fulani communities. Large numbers of cattle were stolen, prompting the Fulani to retaliate with attacks on predominantly Christian villages (Human Rights Watch, 2005). This cycle of violence further worsened tensions, with some village communities targeting Muslim Fulani, who responded with reprisals hence the conflict remains ongoing.

### **Religious and Political Crises in Plateau**

The mass violence in Plateau State over the past decade began on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2001, just over two years after the transition from military to civilian rule in 1999. Higazi (2011) reveals that the idea that the Plateau was previously free of conflict and the self-styled which earned it the name “Home of Peace and Tourism” is somewhat misleading as there were very high levels of violence against the Igbo and other Easterners in Jos, Bukuru and the mines fields in 1966 in which thousands were massacred by Hausa and Berom mobs. The political dynamics were different but more people were killed on the plateau in 1966 than in 2001. These killings tend to be ignored in the literature, which treats the mass violence in Jos in 2001 as unprecedented. There have also been several smaller clashes, particularly in rural areas. But it is true that large-scale religious violence which affected other parts of the north in the 1980s and 1990s, including severe conflicts in other middle belt states, did not occur in Plateau. The 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> September 2001 Muslim-Christian violence in Jos, in which an estimated 1,000 people were killed, was therefore a terrible shock.

According to Higazi (2011), the main precursor to the 2001 mass violence in Jos is that the political dynamics of the conflict were similar, not the scale of killing or destruction was in April 1994. In both cases, a Muslim was appointed to a political position in Jos triggering protests by Plateau indigenes in Jos, then counter-protests by Hausa Muslims which led to violence. The Jos riots in 2001 as in 2010 spread to rural areas outside the city, where there were clashes between Berom (mainly Christian) farmers and Fulani (mainly Muslim) pastoralists and attacks on Muslims in some of the old mining settlements. The rural violence on the Jos Plateau continued intermittently until the end of 2002, when there were a series of what were probably reprisal attacks by the Fulani, many of whom had been displaced from Plateau into Bauchi State, on villages inhabited by Berom



and Irigwe people predominantly farming communities living on the high plateau outside of Jos. More so, Higazi (2011) enunciates that communal violence also occurred across the lowlands, in southern and central areas of Plateau State. This was mainly rural-based and as many as a hundred villages were affected, but some towns and their immediate hinterlands also experienced high levels of violence, Wase and Yelwa being major flashpoints. Some religious leaders, such as the Catholic Archbishop Kaigama, have played a positive role in inter-religious dialogue, trying to promote peace. Religious interface committees were formed after the 2001 Jos violence, but the conflicts are underpinned by political and socio-economic and not just religious factors. Nonetheless, the churches do have political influence in Plateau State, and religious leaders can influence the attitudes of their congregations in mosques and churches, so they have an important role in conflict prevention and resolution.

Religion has become entrenched in Nigerian politics since the mid-1970s, with both politicians and religious leaders urging their followers to vote within religious lines (Falola, 1998). Some factors have contributed to the religious and political tension of Plateau. The national regime change in 1999 gave religion a new perspective. The birth of the fourth republic was followed by violent conflicts between Muslims and Christians in the Northern states which further eroded trust between many religious communities in Jos. With the introduction of the Sharia criminal code in twelve northern states in 2000 and 2001, this provoked major protest from Christians. Many objected to what they perceived as a progressive Islamization of public life and discrimination against Christian minorities in many Northern cities. The disputes over Sharia resulted in a deadly inter-religious violence in the cities of Kano and Kaduna. According to Human Rights Watch (2001), this development led a substantive number of Christians to move out from some northern states, such as Kano and Bauchi, into Plateau State. This brought stories of discrimination and atrocities, exacerbating tensions between religious communities in Jos.

Among Christians, the perceptions of the religious and political conflict have become interlinked with regional and national politics. This scenario is portrayed as a first step towards winning political control over Nigeria and expanding Islamic influence on the African continent. However, many Christian are of the view that, if the Muslims counterparts conquer Plateau, they have Nigeria and if they have Nigeria, they have Africa. According to Davuruk (personal communication, December 4, 2023), many Christian have refused to give credence to the generalizations that portray the local conflict over political participation in Plateau and as a religious confrontation of international dimensions. Many Christians among the religious leaders, academia and journalists have invoked the terms jihad and terrorists to explain the current situation. P. Yakubu (personal communication, December 4, 2023), opines that several Christian representatives and NGO's understand the struggle over Jos as a direct extension of the 19th-century Usman Dan Fodio jihad which came to a halt on the mountains of Plateau thereby taking the causes of the contemporary political crisis in Jos into lesser account. In response to the 2008 crisis, many Christian leaders linked the Jos conflict to a broader religious confrontation. They pointed to the destruction of religious institution rather than political institutions after election disputes. For example, the former chairman of the Plateau State Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Archbishop Ignatius



Kaigama who is known for his very active role in inter-faith peace-building, stated subsequent to the 2008 riot:

We were taken aback by the turn of events in Jos. We thought it was political, but from all indications it is not so. We were surprised at the way some of our churches and properties were attacked and some of our faithful and Clergy killed. The attacks were carefully planned and executed. The questions that bog our minds are why churches were and Clergy attacked and killed? Why were politicians and political party offices not attacked if it were a political conflict? Why were the business premises and property of innocent civilians destroyed? We strongly feel that it was not political, but pre-meditated act under the guise of elections (p. 28).

The Muslim leadership in Jos vehemently protested on the religious framing of the 2008 crisis. In the name of the Jos North Muslim Ummah, they stated:

The November 2008 violence in Jos was ethno-political in all ramifications. Its antecedents, the circumstances, the principal actors and the reason so far adduced by all parties only point to one inevitable conclusion. The struggle by ethnic groups to capture the political power and manipulate for selfish reasons or to keep as vehicle for attaining socio-political goals. (p. 70).

We cannot deny the fact that Mosques and Churches were destroyed in the mayhem, so also Schools, Residential houses, markets and other places that serve the common needs of all, regardless of faith, were destroyed (Jos North Muslim Ummah, 2009). During the 2011 campaigns for gubernatorial elections, the religious and regional framing of the Jos conflict surfaced once more. Former Deputy-Governor Pauline Tallen had secured Jasawa support in her race against Governor Jonah Jang. Yet days before the vote, text messages were sent around in Jos claiming that she was an instrument within the collective Hausa aspirations to rule Nigeria (Owuamanam, 2011). The Council of Ulama has not confirmed responsibility for the text message. Its origin remains unclear, but deliberate fabrication is very likely. The voting pattern confirmed that Tallen's cooperation with the Jasawa in Jos damaged her chances among Christian and indigene voters. Governor Jang won the election by a clear margin.

### **Struggle Over Land**

The problem for the escalation of the conflict in Mangu, Plateau is the tussle or struggle selling of land between the Fulani and the community which is fueled by disunity within the community. According to Akerjiir (2018), there is a division amongst the people in the community because most lands sold to the Fulani by some members of the community did not inform or seek consents from the elected king or the people in the community. This kind of act shows that a communal land can be sold even without the consents of the people in the community. According to the land Act, in a situation where land is owned by lineages or extended families, individuals or persons only have a right of use on such family land and cannot be sold without consents from the king or family head. Most of the villages who are not aware of the selling of land just go to the farm





unaware and are killed in the bid to challenge the activities of the Fulani's on their farm. This also narrates the struggle over land in this context.

### **Some Predicators of Muslim-Christian Conflict in Plateau State**

#### **Criminal Impostors as Fulani Herdsmen**

A proper examination of the escalation of the conflict in Plateau is considered to the fact that criminals in the community disguise themselves as Fulani herdsmen to attack innocent people, rape women, and steal from the farmers. In the course of the research, it was discovered that there is a cult group terrorizing some communities since the Fulani herdsmen attacked in 2021. According to M. E. Gumwesh (personal communication, November 20, 2023), who gave the true picture of those behind the various attacks in Mangu community was unraveled when the police arrested the criminal groups. Further investigation about the criminal group reveals that, they have turned Mangu community into a ghost town whereby kidnapping and killing of indigenes and passersby are the order of the day for some years now. While disguising themselves as Fulani herdsmen, Ozor (2018) maintains that, prior to most of the incidents that took place, a number of deadly attacks on innocent people including visitors to the community have been recorded. This kind of approach from criminals to ensure that they benefit from the hostile or mistrust environment is not an alien phenomenon in a conflict setting, most especially in Mangu community.

#### **Poor Governance**

Poor governance has played a critical role in fueling Christian-Muslim conflicts in Plateau State, where weak institutional frameworks and ineffective policies have exacerbated existing religious and ethnic tensions. After Nigeria's independence, the administrative restructuring of grazing lands led to the fragmentation of areas traditionally used by pastoralist herders. The Nigerian government's efforts to address these issues, such as the Grazing Reserves Act of 1964, were poorly implemented. Although the Act designated 415 areas for grazing, only 114 of these were officially recognized and protected. The failure to fully realize the plan left many areas vulnerable to conversion for other uses, including business and housing developments, contributing to increased competition over land resources (Oladotun and Emmanuel, 2019). Furthermore, the Land Use Act of 1978, which centralized control over land allocation in the hands of state authorities, disproportionately favored farmers over herders. More literate farmers could navigate the bureaucracy more easily and secure certificates of land ownership, while Fulani herders, who had historically relied on communal land use, were excluded. This exclusion intensified conflicts between herders, many of whom are Muslim, and farmers, many of whom are Christian, creating a socio-economic divide that aligned with religious differences (Okello, 2014). Poor governance, marked by inadequate land management and the inability to address disputes equitably, thus became a significant predictor of Christian-Muslim conflicts in Plateau State. The government's failure to mediate effectively between competing land interests contributed to the perception of marginalization among the Fulani herders, further inflaming religious and ethnic tensions (Oladotun and Emmanuel, 2019). This situation underscores how weak governance structures can exacerbate resource-based conflicts, particularly in multi-religious societies like Plateau State.



### **Armed Groups and Attacks**

The Christian Muslim conflict did not appear recently in Mangu community. However, the conflict has transformed and escalated terribly after 2019. Abbass (2012) reveals that there were traditional negotiation mechanisms which used to be helpful to solve the conflicts but it never yielded fruits. One of the reasons for the transformation and escalation of this conflict is the armament of non-state groups or individuals. For some time now, the Fulani herders attacks villages with weapons and kill farmers, burn down their houses and villages, rape women, steal goods amongst other things. Okeke (2014) enunciates that there is no proof or official announcement that shows where the Fulani herdsmen do get their guns from as they attack. According to S. Dickson (personal communication, November 18, 2023), some Fulani herders attacked farmers in Plateau from the neighboring countries such as Niger and Cameroon. The illegal armament in the region and loose border control between Nigeria and its neighbours are just some other escalating factors in this conflict. The armed herders or bandit groups do not threaten local people only for certain period, some of them do not return to where they came from, instead, they occupy the lands of the farmers they attacked and killed. This situation causes bigger problems since people know that they are murderers and might be the next target of the attackers. It destroys the secure atmosphere in rural areas and creates mistrust amongst people (Okeke, 2014).

### **Weak Security Mechanism**

The weak security mechanism in Nigeria has given way to the infiltration of deadly attacks between Christian Muslims conflicts. It is a normal situation in Nigeria that the police or military forces are very late to respond to attacks and cannot stop the armed groups before they burn down villages or kill each other. This is as a result of several reasons such as ill-training and ill-equipment of the security forces. They are not well equipped with the technologies they would need for the tough nature conditions such as forests and hills. Also, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) state that some officers are allegedly in cahoots with attackers, which make it harder for the state to cope with the situation.

Impunity is one of the biggest issues of security and justice systems in the country. The armed groups who attack farmers and villages most of the time do not face any penalties and charges. They are not even arrested by the police as they keep continuing their lives as nothing happened. This situation pushes people to look for ways to protect themselves without the help of the state and usually the situation gets even worse. Since the conflicts between farmers and herders transformed into a violent one and many dying, Plateau cannot trust the security forces and the justice system and everyone tries to solve their problems on their own which causes further conflicts. Another problem about the governance is the officers who take bribes from citizens. Since the traditional way of solving the conflict with the help of negotiations almost totally collapsed, some disagreements were sent to local governments or courts to be solved. However, this solution works mostly in favor of farmers because the proceedings continue for long time. According to P. Wetpus (personal communication, June 23, 2023), many officers are corrupt and



the leaders of the local authorities are prone to take sides with the farmers because they know that the nomadic people are mostly not available to vote for them in local elections.

### **Effects of Christian Muslim Conflict in Plateau State**

#### **Degrading Agricultural Production**

The ongoing conflict in Plateau State has severely impacted Christian-Muslim relations, particularly within the agricultural sector, which has historically served as a means of livelihood for both communities. The protracted tensions between the largely Christian farming communities and the predominantly Muslim Fulani herders have degraded agricultural production, worsening the fragile relationship between the two groups. Agriculture, essential for meeting the basic nutritional needs of the population, has been significantly affected due to the government's lack of investment in farming technologies and infrastructure. Gürsoy (2019) notes that state and local governments have prioritized other sectors, such as oil production, over agriculture, leaving farmers to rely on outdated methods, thus limiting food production.

The competition for limited resources, particularly land, has escalated conflicts between Christian farmers and Muslim herders. As farmers expand their lands in an effort to increase production, herders, who traditionally rely on open grazing, find their access to grazing lands reduced. This leads to inevitable clashes. Ofuoku and Isife (2010) observe that these encounters often result in the destruction of crops, either because herders lose control of their animals or intentionally allow them to graze on farmlands. These actions further fuel resentment and tension between the two religious communities. Fear and insecurity have deepened the divide between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State. According to M. Danchin (personal communication, June 17, 2023), many Christian crop farmers are afraid to work on their farms due to the fear of attacks by Fulani herdsmen, which has led to a reduction in farming activities. In areas like Mangu community, where many farms were destroyed during the last planting season, the conflict has led to a significant drop in crop productivity. This, in turn, translates to lower income for Christian farmers, whose livelihoods are tied to agriculture, affecting their ability to repay loans, save money, and contribute to food security.

This conflict has also had negative economic consequences for Muslim herders. Emmanuel (2017) highlights that herders face substantial revenue losses due to the killing of their cattle during clashes, further straining their financial standing. Moreover, the competition over land resources has reinforced the religious divide, making it more difficult for both Christian farmers and Muslim herders to peacefully coexist. The lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms has left both groups to fend for themselves, exacerbating tensions and deepening the Christian-Muslim divide in Plateau State. The degradation of agricultural production as a result of Christian-Muslim conflicts has not only affected food security and economic stability in Plateau State but has also intensified religious animosities. The failure of local governance to address the root causes of the conflict inequitable land distribution, weak agricultural policies, and inadequate security has allowed the Christian-Muslim divide to widen, perpetuating cycles of violence and distrust between the two communities.





### **Internal Displacement and Poverty**

Many villagers from Mangu and neighbouring communities are currently facing internal displacement and poverty as some farmers have lost their lands. Also some nomadic herders have been forced to migrate to other regions of Plateau because of the local hostilities in their own communities. Some farmers now live in temporary camps. Farmers who seek refuge in Internally Displaced Camps are usually very poor as they have no income to sustain themselves and their families (International Crisis Group, 2017). It has been discovered that, there are no proper Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps for the people who leave their villages because of the farmer-herders conflict. Genyi (2017) reveals that the Internally Displaced Camps in which many people could find shelter are usually in some churches or school buildings, which also negatively affect the daily life and education opportunities of host communities.

Unemployment could further lead to high rate of poverty in Plateau because as the indigenes are no longer engaging in their business, they will find it difficult to provide for the basic necessities of life. The inability of a person to provide for the basic necessities of life is sequel to the state of poverty. This is in agreement with Salifu (2010) point of view, which explains poverty as a condition of deprivation, lack of economic resources, and loss of capabilities, resulting in the inability of individual, to secure a minimum standard of living for his community or reference group. Kure (2002) also states that poverty is the inability to satisfy basic needs required for a decent living more often, those who are considered poor are those whom resources are inadequate to meet the basic necessities of life. In affirmation to the above viewpoints, farmers-herders' conflict has led to poverty in Mangu community.

### **Loss of People and Hostilities**

After several killings in the beginning of 2000s, reprisal attacks and armament of farmer communities started in Nigeria. Also, sometimes pastoralists' cattle were killed as a response to herdsmen. The communities experience great hostility against each other, although in the beginning it was just a conflict about scarce resources and how to share them; constant attacks, killings, burning villages, rape etc. factors added more and more tension in between nomadic and sedentary groups (Ofuoku and Isife, 2010). In order to feel more secure and try to create defend mechanisms, the collective identities of the groups got stronger. For example, religion and ethnicities started to play bigger role in the conflict because people need strong ties to get together and defend their communities against attackers (Genyi, 2017). The clashes between cattle herders and farmers in Plateau State have been the worst in the region since the tussle started. This has been aggravated with ethnic, religious tensions and reprisal attacks. According to Ekpei (2021), the death toll from attacks by gunmen on farming villages in and around the district of Mangu, Plateau state in the month of May 2021 is over 100. The number of people killed has exceeded 100 people from those attacks. In a report by Mangu district Chairman Daput Daniel states that up till now, there are reports of attacks and burning of houses in many places within the local government area. Also a lawmaker representing Mangu and Bokkos in the Federal House of



Representatives also said that around 100 people has been killed and more than a dozen communities ravaged by attacks.

### **Practical Solutions to Farmers and Herders Conflict in Plateau**

#### **Inter Faith Dialogue and Peaceful Negotiations between Stakeholders**

Dialogue is the surest way to resolve conflict. The focus of peaceful negotiation is to ensure restorative justice. Innes (2003) states that, the focus of restorative justice is on the victim and offender. The harm caused by the incident and how this harm can suitably be redressed either through an apology or some other form of reparation. It could be observed that, when a people of divergent interest fail to dialogue on certain contradicting issues, the result according to Ukandu (2011) would be armed conflict as victims of injustices would be left with no other option but to fight for their survival and demands. But no amount of militia attacks and brutality can solve a problem that otherwise calls for a peaceful negotiations through distributive justice.

According to T. S. Daluk (personal communication, August 15, 2023), the approaches in peaceful negotiation process include; encounter, dialogue, amends, reintegration and inclusion. An encounter entails communication among the stakeholders involved who should amend their ways by taking steps to repair the destruction of farmlands they have caused on their victims which are farmers. On the other hand, reintegration is a process that restores the offender and victim back into the society with their liberty intact; and inclusion is the provision of opportunity for all those that have a stake on the matter to play a role on the conflict remediation process. During this peaceful negotiation, Ezemenaka and Egwu (2018) advise that an admonishment should be directed to both Christians and Muslims in order to report all grievances to officially sanctioned security agencies, instead of taking the law into their own hands.

#### **Provision of Adequate Security**

Security is an enormous problem in Nigeria. The police and military forces are not equally spread over the land and especially in rural areas. The federal government and security forces should make sure that the distribution of security forces around the country is not scattered but instead available for all regions and rural areas. Other than that, there is a need for better training of soldiers and police officers. They should be trained about effective policing and considering the application of human rights standards while on duty (Amnesty International, 2018). Preventing measures are needed to deal with the attackers effectively and stop the killings, burning down of villages and destruction of the farms. People should be protected better from other types of criminal activities such as cattle rustling, kidnapping and pillage. Improving the intelligence activities and working together with local authorities should give the federal state offices more information in time and chance to interfere before violence takes place. Also following the illegal armament and trying to bring an end to the inflow of the arms would be one of the most important steps. (Li, 2018)

The Church should serve as a resource to the community because of her institutional strength and grass-root relevance in mobilizing the indigenes to participate actively in community policing. The need for community policing and involvement through church and other religious agents is



premised on the idea of Ukandu (2011) that, the most strenuous efforts by the Nigeria Police alone will not produce the desired results if the community especially the religious community, stands by passively in the erroneous belief that crimes and its violent expressions are solely the Nigerian Police responsibility. The way forward is community's acceptance and compliance to the challenges and task of crime prevention as a community collective responsibility as well as a police responsibility. Community policing will help to prevent the infiltrations of Fulani herdsmen in the community that causes conflict.

### **Awareness on Conflict Resolution**

Christian and Muslim Clerics in Plateau state have a pragmatic role to play in order to make stringent efforts in order to resolve conflicts between Fulani and Christians in Plateau State. Ukandu (2011) is of the view that the church cannot create peace except in interplay with other forces like the Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) among others. No wonder, Ezeme (2006) observes that, the Muslims and Christians are neither police nor army and it can only boast of her moral force, that the church does its work through teaching and mass mobilization. Hence, Muslim and Christian ministers in Mangu should mobilize and organize seminars for indigenes of the community. During these seminars, the indigenous ministers have to be enlightened and taught about conflict resolution strategies and the best approaches to adopt during conflict resolution dialogue. M. E. Gumwesh (personal communication, November 20, 2023) states that, both ministers should plan in hosting prayers and seminar in all the communities thereby teaching the communities on the need to live in peace. One of the approaches is to report any incident to the appropriate authority and not to take laws into their hands. There are also two other approaches to conflict resolution. First through conciliatory approach, here, the conflict parties could reach an agreement and to interpret the issues at stake and explore ways towards finding an amicable resolution to their conflict.

Another approach to conflict resolution is through force and threat. Obasi and Nnamani (2015) observe that, where the conflict has created a deep rooted feeling of hatred and acrimony, the parties are forced with a threat that not to cross the boundaries of hatred. In this case, boundaries are drawn against the wishes of the conflicting parties or at least one of them. Force and threat approach is not intended to suppress the conflict on the basis of power imbalance but on the parlance of obedience to the group. But to arrive at this point and the use of force in every consultation, opportunities and chances have been given to the parties to arrive at peace. Creating awareness on conflict resolution among the indigenes of Mangu community will help them to be security conscious which could be useful in preventing future attacks of Fulani herdsmen. Furthermore, the indigenous ministers have invited regularly security personnel to teach about security and safety tips that could help the indigenes to prevent Fulani herdsmen from encroaching into their farm lands. This is a way of guiding the people on the need for peaceful negotiation, which the indigenous ministers have played vital role to see that the conflict is resolved.

### **Conclusion**

Interfaith dialogue holds immense potential as a tool for conflict resolution in Nigeria, particularly



in Plateau State, where religious tensions between Christians and Muslims have led to repeated cycles of violence. The historical, political, and economic factors contributing to these conflicts, such as poor governance, unequal access to resources, and land disputes, have exacerbated religious divisions. However, the underlying issues are not solely based on religious differences but are deeply rooted in socio-political inequalities and poor resource management. By fostering mutual understanding and promoting peaceful coexistence through interfaith dialogue, Christian and Muslim communities can work towards resolving conflicts and building sustainable peace in Plateau State. Although interfaith efforts have been made, the enduring nature of the conflict highlights the need for more effective dialogue and stronger political will from local and national authorities. Interfaith dialogue must be coupled with practical solutions that address the root causes of the conflict, such as equitable land distribution, poverty alleviation, and improved governance. It is only through a combination of dialogue, justice, and socio-economic development that the religious divide in Plateau State can be bridged, allowing for lasting peace and harmony.

### **Recommendations**

1. The government, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations should support and expand interfaith dialogue initiatives. These platforms should not only involve religious leaders but also include grassroots members of both Christian and Muslim communities to ensure that the dialogue addresses concerns at all levels of society.
2. Schools and religious institutions should incorporate conflict resolution and peace education into their curricula. This can foster a culture of tolerance, respect, and understanding from an early age, helping to counteract the entrenched divisions between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State.
3. The government must address the underlying economic and land-related issues fueling the conflict. This includes implementing fair land allocation policies, providing equal access to resources, and investing in both farming and pastoralist communities to reduce competition over scarce resources.
4. Local and state governments should establish conflict resolution centers that are accessible to both Christian and Muslim communities. These centers should work alongside interfaith dialogue efforts, providing mediation and arbitration to resolve disputes over land, grazing rights, and other contentious issues.
5. The state must take proactive measures to ensure the security of both Christian farmers and Muslim herders. A neutral and well-trained security force should be deployed to prevent violence and protect both sides from attacks, ensuring that conflict does not escalate.
6. Political leaders must avoid using religious or ethnic sentiments to gain political advantage. Instead, they should promote policies that foster unity and development across religious and ethnic lines, thus preventing the manipulation of religious identities for political gain.

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